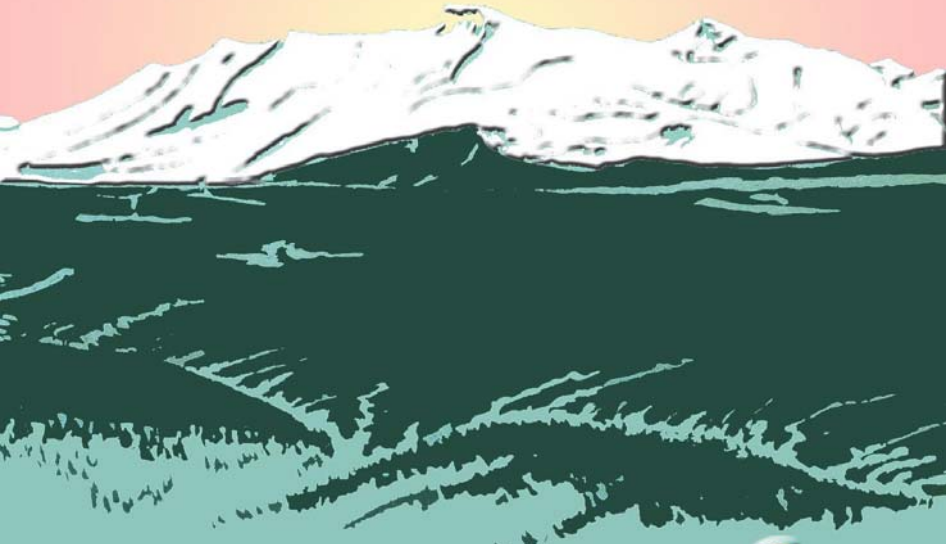
AN EPIC POEM



Mt. Paektu



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By Jo Ki Chon



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Short Biography

The author was born of a poor peasant family on November 6, 1913, in Wonsan-ri, Hoeryong County, North Hamgyong Province.

Owing to the exploitation and oppression perpetrated by the Japanese imperialists occupying Korea, his parents had to leave for the Soviet Union in search of a living. The author followed them and spent his childhood there. After graduating from the Omsk Pedagogical Institute, he taught at the Korea Pedagogical Institute in Kzil-Orda, Central Asia, for some two years. He began his creative activities in those days.

With Korea's liberation on August 15, 1945, he returned home and worked as a journalist for *Joson Sinmun.* In March 1951 he began working as Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the General Federation of Unions of Literature and Art of Korea and writing poems. Among his works is "Mt. Paektu", an epic poem, written in February 1947. The poem paints an epic picture of the battle of Pochonbo, one of the most significant events in the revolutionary history of the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung. In addition, he wrote a number of poems including "Song of Life" and "Korea Fights" that depict the struggle of the Korean people and soldiers both in the days of building a new Korea after liberation and of the Fatherland Liberation War against the US imperialist aggressors. During the war he worked as a correspondent, and while doing so he wrote a poem, "Aircraft Hunters". He was killed in Pyongyang, during a bombing raid by the US imperialists, on July 31, 1951.

PROLOGUE

Friends and brothers! Thirty millions!
Today must my voice be heard!

May the waves of the Lake of the Heavens
Rising like rampant white tigers
Up to the clouds of the sky
Fill my heart with their cold flooding waters.
It is seared by the withering blasts
Which have raged in ages past
In Korea, this land of mine.
I take in hand my trusty brush,
A poet untried and unknown:
In days of freedom this is my weapon,
The bayonet with which I thrust.
Today must my voice be heard!

The rocky cliffs thrust up into the sky,
Steep and fearful, upward-soaring
Their naked peaks ineffably high,
Far beyond the mists of morning.
But we will launch the ship of memory
Against the rushing tide of time
Back, back to those terrible years
When the warriors of our nation
Made that steep and fearful climb,
And lit upon those soaring peaks
The beacon of our liberation.

Those who fought against Japan
Gave Korea back its freedom,
They passed across the broad river Tuman
They passed across the peaks of Changbai,
Where in every mountain valley
Lie the marks of recent battle.
And now I–a free Korean,
Ascend quite freely to the peak.
My homeland is laid out before me
From a height of three thousand *ri*.

O ancient ancestral land!
O lifeblood of my people
Running for over fifty centuries
Through our homeland's veins!
We recall how you were spilt
By the knives of the Japanese.
We recall warriors in their thousands
Sleeping on the fallen leaves,
In the dark of Paektu forest,
Entering the Land of Death
Like the door of their father's house.

Speak, grey-headed Paektu!
Who in this free land
Is the champion of the people,
Who their general in the battle?
Atop the mountain stands a tiger,
Like a statue, calm and still
The Paektu tiger of the legend,
With one mighty paw outstretched,

Gazing southward down the hill.
The gorge shakes to his fearsome roaring,
Threatening vengeance to the foe.
In one bound, swift as the wind,
He has vanished in the mist,
And left the wind alone and sighing
To swirl and play among the cliffs.

Recovering my startled wits,
I harken to the whistling wind,
And I seem to hear once more
The echo of that terrible roar.
I stand here high upon the cliff.
Perhaps this is the very spot
Where our partisans crushed our foes
And fulfilled their wrathful oaths,
As deadly as the swords of battle
Perhaps this is where our bold warriors
Raised aloft our freedom banner.

O lofty and unknown cliff
On the ancient ridge of Changbai,
Whose age-old branching roots
Are entwined with the roots of my heart!
I follow the old battle traces
Collecting my thoughts as I go,
Though surely they are unworthy
Of the heroes who battled here.
Still I wish, fellow citizens, brothers,
Though my voice be uncertain and weak,
To sing with my heart and my soul
Of our people’s heroic deeds.

CHAPTER ONE

1

Hills and mountains, hills and cliffs
Stretch unending out of sight.
Pass one valley on your way
And another lies before you.
Passing along the mountain track
You will see outstretched above you
Spreading branches of ancient oaks
Woven with the cedars' branches.

The valley climbs the mountain slowly,
Feebly descends the other side,
Like a man by work exhausted.
Many hundreds of *ri* beyond
Lies the thick snow-sprinkled forest.
Even the wild beast comes not here
And no bird will fly this way –
To Changbai ridge's lofty lair.

The howling blizzard heaps up drifts
But between, among the bare cliffs,
The eye discerns a solitary track,
Leading ever up and north,
But who can have passed this way?

Perhaps some hunter gone astray,

Trusting fate to wind and snow?
But why should he northward go,
To where ancient snow-haired Paektu
Ever stands on menacing guard
With his tumbling avalanches
And his icy blizzard breath?

2

Look more closely at this track:
These are not lost and wandering steps.
People passed here in the night,
Bearing arms, in robes of white.
They were a hundred strong and more,
But they left a single track
As they passed on to the north
Amidst the vast and snowy wastes.

And now look–the Japanese
Pass by, floundering as they go.
Dogs lead the detachment on,
Bayonets on guns gleam brightly
The officer's glasses catch the sun.
"There are only one man's tracks,"
Says the officer, astonished,
"Where are all the other devils?"
But his thoughts are left unspoken,
The icy silence rudely broken,
And the glasses tumble down,
With no time to glance around
In the direction of the shot.

3

Then the air is ripped and torn
By the roar of a machine-gun,
And the crackling rifle-fire
Fills the icy Hongsan valley
With a ringing triple echo.
Forward! Forward!
And the white-robed running figures
Hurtled down the cliffy slope
Like an avalanche of stones
Upon the Japanese.
And there was the iron clashing
Of weapons wielded hand to hand,
Bayonets were brightly glinting
Like swift bolts of steel-blue lightning.

“Comrades!
Let not one Japanese
Be left alive by us today!”

4

Thus spoke the partisan commander,
A youth. He ran aloft the hill,
His robes extended like white wings
Up into the heavens soaring.
And his glance, a sabre blade,
Transfixed the field of battle.

“Comrades!
Let not one Japanese
Be left alive by us today!”

The sabre glinted in his hand,
And two Japanese with rifles
Who had still thought to resist,
Lay stretched out upon the snow.

Who is he, this youthful leader
Of victorious partisan struggle,
At whose name the Japanese
Waxing pale, begin to tremble?

Among the people it is said
Kim Il Sung is lord of the mountains,
That they obey his every wish,
That he can join the peaks of Paektu
And then sunder them again;
That like unto a mountain eagle
He can soar from peak to peak.

A star is shining in the north,
Flooding with its brilliant light
The steep banks of the Amnok river.
Among the people it is said
That on the distant peaks of Paektu
Dwells the mighty hero Kim
With a band of fearless warriors.

5

The battle runs its bloody course,
The partisans, the forest warriors,
Gather up their scattered weapons.
Japanese dead litter the valley,
Cut down by the sword of vengeance.
And how many fled in terror,
Unmindful of their emperor's honour,
Or the famous warrior code
Of the noble samurai?

"Not one was left to flee the scene
Of those who bore their weapons here!"
Reports the partisan Chol Ho.
Kim Il Sung laughs but briefly–
His laugh is like a peony blossom
Scattering petals on the snow.

6

The blizzard howls,
The world is painted white–
Valleys and peaks, and sky and earth.
And cedars bear their load of snow
Like blossom on the apple trees of spring.

Beneath the cedars tents are set,
And sweet smoke rises from a fire,
And the partisans sleep sweetly.

In one tent alone till dawn
A field-lamp burns and splutters feebly.

When the dawn is palely trembling
From the tent of Kim Il Sung
Chol Ho, political worker, sets out on his journey.
Though the blizzard rage unceasing,
Though the earth be frozen hard as oak.
Still his warrior's heart glows warmly
In the memory of the handshake
And the parting words of Kim Il Sung:
"Take good care, eternal friend Chol Ho!"

7

The blizzard howls in the mountain valleys
Rushing through ravines and groves,
Seeking someone but not finding,
Wailing loud in sorrow and in woe;
Or it roars in spite like some wild beast,
And hurls itself against the cliffy walls
And flies across the mountain crests
Rushing madly to the southeast,
To where the ice has bound the Amnok's flow.

Blizzard! Blizzard! Do you know
That with you on the mountain peaks
Travels partisan Chol Ho?
Journeying beyond the Amnok river
To set foot on his native land once more?

Blizzard! Blizzard!
You are also from Changbai,
You must help the partisan!

Chol Ho’s road is hard and long,
To southeast, to Songjin and Hamhung,
Past the military border town
That lies along his way.
Blizzard! Blizzard!
Helpmate to the partisan,
Cover Chol Ho with your snowy blasts,
Hide him from rapacious alien eyes,
So that he may cross the Amnok river
And reach his sacred native land once more.

CHAPTER TWO

1

Mist hangs above the mountain village
In lingering farewell to twilight,
Feeling with its silent fingers
All the paths along its way,
Spreading over shadowy hills,
Creeping like a flock of sheep
Caressing Sabalbong's tall cliffs,
Hiding in the pinewood forest
As though withdrawing into sleep,
Then finally descending on the village
To end its journey down from Paektu peak.

2

"Night has fallen,"
Says Kkotpun.
All evening long she gathers roots
And the herbs which bear the name of Chik.
Kkotpun has to gather these,
For the pot upon the hearth
Holds only water,
And the tub which should be filled with rice
Has become a spider's webby den.

Darkness thickens...
Behold your fate, Kkotpun –
To wander, gathering bitter roots
And boil a gruel for your breakfast
And your lunch and supper too.
Darkness spreads across the earth
And birds are slumbering in their nests
And the village slumbers in the mist,
And still your basket is not full.

3

Oh bitter Chik-root!
Here in our native land,
Where flowers are gay and butterflies abound,
Why do the women and the children wander
On legs swollen and weak from hunger
And gather bitter herbs,
While at the stations and the ports
The piles of rice mount ever higher
Gazing upon the straits of Genkai-nada?
Who carries all this rice away?
Who eats it?
Oh bitter Chik-root!
How closely fate has intertwined you
With our people’s life today!

4

Above the forest flies a coal-black raven

Squawking and gazing down upon Kkotpun.
Darkness is rapidly advancing,
The air along her way is thickening,
Her heart is filled with black foreboding,
When suddenly from out the forest depths
A shadow rises up and blocks her path.
Who can it be,
Phantom or human?

5

“Can you tell me, young woman,
Where Kim Yun Chil is to be found?”
His words fall heavy as a boulder,
His weathered features hang before her,
Menacing in the gloom.

“Most certainly: he is my father.”
“Then you must be Kkotpun!”
His eyes began to glitter.
“What a great good fortune!”
The man turned quickly to the forest,
And gave a bird-like twitter.
Two men come out of the forest.

6

Four people sit upon the forest floor.
One of them is Chol Ho.
Through frost and blizzard,

Wind and snow,
Our brave warrior has made his way.
A long and weary road.
Where have his wanderings
Led our solitary traveller?
What brought him here,
Into the forest depths?

When the sun's gently warming rays
Melted the snow upon the mountainside,
And the dark slopes were overgrown with grass
And veiled as in a dream of green,
And spring bloomed in the azalea branches,
How many mountains had our hero crossed?
How many nights had hid him on his way?
Oh, do not ask...

With him sits his comrade,
An aged worker from Hamhung,
Bearing medicines to the Hongsan gorge.
In Hongsan stands a hospital
Where sick and healer both alike
Address each other only in one way:
"Comrades!"

The third is Chol Ho's orderly–Yong Nam,
A boy of barely sixteen years.
Today he leaves for yet another town,
And always laughs and sings
The song of *Arirang*.

7

Although the gloom has thickened into night,
It seems the rays of the declining sun
Play gently on the cheeks of fair Kkotpun
As she gazes long at brave Chol Ho.
From far away
He guided all her work
As she printed out leaflets
And sewed warm jackets for the partisans.
In the young maid's imagination
Chol Ho was well advanced in years,
Yet now there stands before her
A tall youth with an honest face
And blazing eyes.
"He is no more than twenty-five,"
Thought Kkotpun to herself.

"Kkotpun, where is the duplicator now?"
"Don't worry," she replies,
"It's hidden by the spring, beneath a rock."

8

The village slumbers peacefully,
Only the doors of the police station
Still stand ajar, as though even at night
The village is still under observation.

Beneath the trees the friends say their farewells,

Shaking each other's hands without a word,
And in the touching of their hands,
The meeting of their hearts is clearly felt.

The handshake of these warrior comrades
Is like the partisans' resounding oath:
Shaking hands before the battle started
The warriors threw themselves into the maelstrom,
Or faced the torture-chamber undismayed,
Or walked impassive to the gallows tree.

The handshake of these warrior comrades
Is pure and honest as an infant's smile,
Firm and unshifting as a mother's love,
Warm as the sun above our native land–Korea.

CHAPTER THREE

1

Long long ago at Solgae–Eagle Gorge–
There stood a huntsman's hut
Beneath the sheltering pines.
The eagles loved this wild and rocky place,
But now they have all vanished without trace.
Upon the naked peak sits one lone raven,
His plaintive call resounding round the cliffs.

Koreans lived here once,
They lived by hunting,
Gathering round the fire
To clean their guns
And talk about the business of the day.
But now their forebears' rusted weapons
Have been surrendered to the Japanese,
And on the lands below they work as peasants,
Burning the forest,
Grubbing up roots
And planting millet or kaoliang.

Here in the isolation of Solgae
The aged Kim Yun Chil has made his home.
After the Battle of the First of March
After his wife was tortured by the Japanese
And thousands of Korean warriors

Withdrew beyond the Tuman river into China,
He hid his own old weapon
Within the hollow of an ancient pine
And set out on the road to seek for work
Till finally he and his daughter, like the rest,
Returned to work upon the land,
To bury in it all their grief and woe,
And for all time preserve their sacred hope.

But then, perhaps a year ago,
The ashes of his hope were fanned into a flame
When rumour reached his isolated home
That in the secret heart of Paektu mountain
There was vast and mighty cavern,
In which the sun and stars both shone,
In which Korean warriors in their thousands
Sharpened their sabres on the rocks
And waited for the battle summons
To rush into the fray.
And on that fearful day
The cliffs would part asunder
And the warriors would flood forth
To wipe the Japanese from the face of the earth.

Henceforth Kkotpun followed Chol Ho's
instructions,
Henceforth, when she would gaze on Paektu
mountain,
Her heart that had been wracked with weary
torment,
Knew peace again,
As though the mountain streams of spring

Had washed away her pain.

3

White-haired Paektu!
Witness of the ages!
The slashing hooves of Genghis Khan's mounted
hordes
Left wounds upon your breast.
And Toyotomi Hideyoshi's bloody samurai
blades
Were thrust into your bleeding body.
Five centuries of Ri's despotic rule
Shattered in shame against your flank.
Since then hundreds of thousands of Koreans,
Rejecting conquest and oppression,
Have left their native land
To live beyond the Amnok river,
Bearing ever in their hands
The sacred torch of freedom.
Such is the legacy of Hong Gyong Rae
And of the mighty heroes of the Kabo War.
Our native land, nurtured by Koreans
For five thousand years,
Is now tormented by the Japanese dragon,
And even you, great Paektu mountain,
Have bowed your head in sad exhaustion.
But now the fires of struggle have been lit,
Koreans have taken up the sword,
The ranks of warriors strong and swift
Are swelling rapidly on every side.

The first day of March announced Korea's
revolt.
The groans of hungry fanners filled the air
In factories the work ground to a halt.
Even the waters of the Songhuajiang rose up in
wrath,
And the Great Wall of China was reduced to
dust.
The partisans came forth to start their fight,
Beneath the sacred banner of resistance.

Paektu mountain!
Within your heart a sudden blizzard stirred,
Like a swift storm upon the East Sea of Korea,
You gazed in wrath upon the cursed foe,
Invaders from the islands of the east.

4

She was called Kkotpun
For her great beauty,
Which was like a flower of spring,
And for the tender whiteness
Of her skin.
Her childhood flew by quickly
In the shadow of Hyesan,
Living in the lonely village of Solgae,
She never knew the classroom's discipline,
But in the long winter nights,
Her father her only teacher,
She learned somewhat to read and write.

And as she read the tattered books
She wept with rage and hate
And cursed the plundering merchants
Who flung Sim Chong into the ocean waves.
And as she gathered bitter roots and herbs
She dreamt her hand was joined with his
In severing the head of the oppressor
Who locked Chun Hyang into the torture-cell.
The woeful stories that her father told
Left in the young girl's heart a frozen core
Of hatred mingled half and half with pain.

5

At nights she thought at length
About her mother,
Killed by the Japanese,
And the strings of her heart
Were wrung with grief.
She thought about the young Korean
Who bit out his own tongue
So it could not betray him as he slept
Or give away his comrades
When the torturer plied his trade.

She thought about the peasant-woman
Who lay beside her husband in the attic,
Covering him from the Japanese bayonets
That ripped and tore into her flesh,
And did not groan, because she feared
That he might hear her, and his righteous anger

Would drive him down to fight.

Kkotpun swore an oath
That she would be like her –
And she will keep her word.

6

Night-time in the mountain village,
The peasants are asleep,
Huddled beneath their piles of tattered rags.
The water-mill works softly in the gloom,
A weary sound of hopeless clutching
After flowing water,
A symbol for the hunger of Solgae.

And only in a single hut
The night is filled with struggle and with life.
Chol Ho and young Kkotpun
Are printing out the final leaflets
Which Chol Ho must take with him in the morning.

There comes a sound of heavy tramping feet.
“Put out the light!”
That is the voice of Kim Yun Chil,
Standing on guard
Outside the window of the hut.
Chol Ho takes up the leaflets and the printer.
But already the police are at the door.
The moment draws out to a thousand years,

And through their minds the thoughts run
Lightning-swift.

7

“Chol Ho, lie with my father in the bed,”
Kkotpun says calmly in the darkness,
”And take the printer and the leaflets too.”

“Are you asleep, old man?”
The Japanese call from the porch.

“Who’s there?”
Kkotpun drew back the curtain,
And called out in a sleepy voice.
“Excuse me, I am still undressed...
Before I light the lamp
Let me put on a dress...
Oh Lord! The kerosene has spilt
(To hide the dangerous duplicator smell)
One moment now...”

The policeman sees the fleeting silhouette
Of a half-naked girl upon the window.
“Come in,” she said and gave a sleepy smile,
As though still in the grip of pleasant dreams.

8

“It stinks of kerosene in here!

Who's that?"
"My husband."
"I see. Now you're married,
You take much earlier to your bed!"
"Oh no, sir, it's already late..."
"No idle chatter now, tell the old man
To come in to the station in the morning!"
With one more glance around the room
The Japanese withdrew, and slammed the door.

Kkotpun hid her blazing face
Behind her hands:
"Forgive me please..."
She hurried out into the kitchen,
Chol Ho was left alone in the dark room.

"What a fine warrior and comrade is Kkotpun!"
The young man's heart called out in the darkness,
And in his heart he went down on his knees
Before his bold comrade-in-arms and friend–
Before this gallant daughter of Korea.
Gathering up the leaflets in his hands,
Chol Ho went out into the night.

CHAPTER FOUR

1

The campfire flickers in the gloom.
Dark night has fallen on the Changbai woods,
A darkness that alarms the very soul,
Smothering reason in a veil of black.

Flaring up brightly now and then,
Scattering gleaming sparks into the air,
Then huddling back against the sheltering earth,
The campfire battles with the pitch-black night,
A battle like the fearsome clash
That took place on the paths of Paektu mountain.

Oh campfire of the partisans!
The man who stares into your flames
And reaches out his hands to warm them,
Will feel his blood warmed with the will to live,
The will to face the enemy and conquer.
Oh campfire of the partisans!
Your merry crackling brings both faith and hope,
And summons them to take the road to battle.
Oh campfire of the partisans!
You have replaced the home-fire on the hearth
The warrior warms his supper on your flame
And he sleeps sweetly in the wintry night,
Lulled by the crackling branches of your blaze.

The warriors trod the road of death to be here,
Destroying on their way an enemy division,
And now you summon them to battles new.
Oh campfire of the partisans!
You are a beacon in the gloom of midnight,
Our hope gleams in the flickering of your light.

2

Long marches leave the legs athrob with pain,
And every wound is smarting sorely,
And for four days now
None of the partisans have eaten.
Yet they have fallen into slumber deep–
Weariness has lulled them into sleep.
But one man sits up wakeful by the fire,
Unheedful of the passing night:
Such nights he always spends in reading,
And draws strength from the words he reads,
And sees the pathway to their goal more clearly.
When his soul exults in triumph, he takes up his book,
And in those fatal moments of dark fear,
When black despair invades his heart,
He takes the book out in his forest shelter.
Then, when the soup-pot holds a soldier's belt,
And images appear before his eyes
Of the poor house in which he spent his childhood,
Beneath the mountain covered o'er with pines,
And piteous scenes which he cannot dispel,

Then he seeks solace in his book.
And even when he seems to see his mother
Boiling poor gruel with a mournful sigh,
His saviour is the book that he keeps at his side.
His thoughts are these:
“As yet we are but few,
But we are certain of ourselves,
And our assurance lights our way.
In time this light will spread
Across the territory of our land.
With us we have the whole Korean people,
But also peoples of a Northern Country,
Who have raised up a mighty fortress
Of freedom and of justice,
And they will rout the forces
Of aggression and of darkness.”

And then he thinks that soon
The people that he sent to seek provisions
Will join them once again;
That finally, at last, there will be news
Of his dear friend Chol Ho, so long-awaited...

The campfire,
Weary from its night-long battle with the
darkness,
Has died away, when only one man stands up
calmly.
“It begins to dawn,” says he.
In the east the golden dawn
Is scattering the final shreds of darkness
And bringing brightness to the world once more.

3

Food arrived that morning,
From somewhere people brought back to the camp
Two fat bulls that they had caught.
Swiftly the camp was roused to bustling life–
Without awaiting orders from their chief,
The warriors fanned the campfire to a blaze
And put a cutting-edge upon their blades.
But at this moment Kim Il Sung arrived
And asked:
“Where did you get these bulls?”
“They were taken from the Japanese
Down at the logging-camp,”
The junior officer reported.
But Kim looked at the faces of the bulls,
Hung with embroidered ornaments
And little coins.
“Comrades! Let me ask you,
When did the partisans begin to plunder
And to steal from their own people?
Look closely at the faces of these bulls:
The Japanese use no such decorations.
This bull belongs to our Korean peasants,
And this–to Chinese brothers in our struggle.”
And so Kim Il Sung told his warriors
That they were ordered to dispatch the bulls
Back to their rightful peasant owners,
And go once more to gather forest roots

And breakfast on a porridge made of grass.
The partisans sat down there in the meadow,
And the well-fattened bulls wandered off slowly
Back home to the village,
Nibbling at the grass along the way.
But the partisans were wondering
If their deeds would bring them punishment,
For they had slaughtered one fat bull
On their way back to join the regiment.

4

The partisans have formed up in a circle,
The commander standing silent in the centre,
The sun's rays peer timidly into the forest,
The air is heavy with the threat of punishment.

"I ask you all: who killed the bull?"
No reply comes: the silence thickens.
The ranks are motionless...
"Who killed the bull?"

The ranks part silently and out steps partisan
Choe Sok Jun,
Pale and trembling, into the circle.
"Comrade commander, I'm the one to blame..."

A tremor of surprise runs through the ranks,
How could it be that our well-loved Sok Jun,
Famed for his valour in attack and in the rear,
Could break his oath and disobey his orders?

Sok Jun stands with his eyes fixed on the ground,
His face grown paler still,
His voice both strained and trembling:

“Comrades, for four days now
The men and the commander have not eaten...”
Then voices rang out from the ranks:
“Shame on the man!”
“We don’t want his excuses!”
“He’s helped the Japanese!”

Sok Jun asked hoarsely:
“Who has helped the Japanese?”
“You have helped them, you!”
“In that case I must die...”
He sets the barrel of his rifle
Firm against his chest.

“Stand to attention!”
Roared the voice of the commander,
And all the other voices there were crushed
As though beneath a sheet of iron.

5

“Comrades!
Just as a little stream
Joins with the other streams
To form a mighty river,
So we must fuse together with the people
To form a mighty river and an ocean.

Our strength lies always in the people's power,
Without them we are doomed to certain failure,
And then the Japanese will have their way.
You have not understood this fact, Sok Jun!"

"I understand," the warrior replies,
"That I am guilty of a grievous crime..."

The punishment hill rises up before him.
How shall he find the strength to climb that
slope?

(The grass, for all its covering of frost,
Has probably far more life in its veins.)
The partisans can have no doubt at all
The punishment must be the firing-squad.

The heavy silence that precedes a storm.
Silence, deadly silence, not a sound:
"Go find the owner of the bull you killed
And pay him for his loss!"
Kim Il Sung walks slowly to his tent,
And Sok Jun's cheeks are flushed with scarlet red,
The partisans revive to bustling life,
The sun emerges from behind the clouds,
The warriors' hearts are beating swift and loud
In proud devotion to their wise commander.

6

For ten days now the warriors' camp

Has been set out here in the mountain groves,
And peasants come from distant villages,
The Chinese and Koreans come,
Each seeking to outdo all others there
In rendering assistance to the partisans.

But not once in the course of these ten days
Does their commander take a moment's sleep,
Till finally, on the eleventh day,
A messenger arrives in worker's clothes,
Bearing a message and a little map
Sent by Chol Ho.

The dawn was scarcely trembling in the sky
When the division set out southeast.
Ahead there lay the mountain cliffs and crests,
The winding, weary mountain road–
But not one man allowed into his mind
The thought that this road was a hard one,
For even in the icy winter nights,
When wolves are frozen in their dens,
And birds' wings frozen solid as they fly,
Each partisan would gladly hear the news
That they must set out southeast.
Nor cold nor hunger would deter him
From travelling with a light and joyful heart
The road that led him homewards!

Oh homeward road!
Both waking and in dreams
The partisans still see you there before them.
And if they are not fated in this life

To cross the threshold of their father's house,
Then may the bones of those who served their homeland
Find rest eternal in their native soil.

Oh homeward road!
Oh bitter road of battle!
Lead on the warriors southeast,
Until they cross the mighty Amnok river,
And reach their sacred homeland once again!

CHAPTER FIVE

1

The noise of skirmish fades away at last,
The final shot of hot pursuit is fired.

Chol Ho ran swiftly across the rocky slopes,
Racing along an unknown path.
His heart was pounding heavily,
His throat seemed filled with scalding ash.

In the night forest the huge trees
Stood like a wall besilvered by the moon.
Here at the last our hero ceased his running.
He set the wounded boy down on the moss
That the bright moonlight turned a gentle blue,
And called him softly by his name:
“Yong Nam...”
The only answer was a stifled groan,
Blood still poured out where the coat was torn.
“Let’s go, Yong Nam, come on with me to
Solgae...”
But still he does not move.
Chol Ho takes up the boy into his arms,
Just as a mother would lift up her ailing son.

2

Oh night of great misfortune!
Scarcely had they crossed the Amnok river
When they ran into the Japanese frontier guards.
Oh night of great misfortune!
Chol Ho alone knows what occurred:
His friend lies motionless,
His consciousness has not returned.
And Chol Ho wanders northeast,
Across the rocky slopes to Solgae,
In an attempt to save Yong Nam.
Ever more tortuous and steep his road–
Behind the Japanese lie still in wait,
Ahead the mist hides dangers beyond count.
You travellers upon these mighty mountains,
Wanderers along these fearsome paths,
You understand the dangers of this route.
Come to the assistance of our hero
Wipe the sweat from off his brow
And help him bear his sad load down to Solgae.
The road he travels has no name as yet,
But time will make it known to all
And link it evermore with his own name.

3

Chol Ho knows not the distance he has travelled,
Nor how much time has passed along the way.
His heart is burdened with a single worry–

To reach his goal and save the boy he carries.
And with the dawn, when he has almost reached
The mountain-village hideaway he seeks,
Yong Nam recovers consciousness.
The first words that he whispered were:
“The message...must deliver...”
And then he asked for water.
Chol Ho went down to the stream
That ran below in the ravine.

Yong Nam was left alone upon the grass
Beneath an ancient pine,
Gazing wide-eyed
Up at the clouds in the blue sky above,
Suddenly he sat up and clenched his fists:
“Long life to free Korea!”
He cried in ringing tones.
The echo of his words
Was thrown back to him
By the towering cliffs.

This was the challenge of life and freedom
Thrown out by a wounded stormy-petrel
Before it tumbles on the rocky shore
And waves its broken wing in brief farewell.

The boy fell back upon the grass,
Two streams of blood came trickling from his mouth
And mingled with the dew upon the ground.
His eyes were darkened by a thickening mist,
The branches rustled gently in the wind.

4

There at the forest's edge, beneath the ancient
pine,
Chol Ho digs out the young boy's grave.
Who could have known that in this very spot
This brave young soul would take its final leave
Of life and struggle.
This soul as pure as any mountain stream,
This heart that overflowed with love
For his ancestral land!

Chol Ho dug out the grave and floods of tears
Fell on the dark-brown earth, the earth
On which had fallen thousands of his fellow-
warriors
In fierce uneven battle with the foe.
"May your soul rest peace. We'll revenge your
death."

In what ravines,
Upon what hills,
Beneath what tree or rock or cliff
Are all these unknown graves concealed?...

You woodcutter, who works these mighty cliffs,
Cut carefully the trunks of these great trees–
Here in the wood they watch over the souls
Of warriors who died to save their country.
You traveller upon these grandiose peaks,
Touch not the rocks that lie along the road–

Beneath them–who can tell? –there yet may lie
The skeletons of warriors who died to save their
people.

5

A pathway runs along the cliffy slopes,
The mist creeps, clutching at the path,
And falls down at the feet of fair Kkotpun
As she goes down for water from the stream.

Down by the stream, beneath a reddish rock,
The duplicator nestles safe and sound,
Hidden away from Japanese police.
Kkotpun walks slowly, thinking as she goes
About the youthful partisan.
Where is he now?
Why does his memory oppress her heart
With ever greater power?

6

Along the banks azaleas are in flower...
The petals that fell with the morning light
Are scattered on the silver surface of the water.

Kkotpun gathers them up into her gentle hands
And the reflection of her sparkling eyes
Gleams in the water’s shining mirror.

“Will we not meet?...
But then our souls may meet again somewhere...”
A red flush rises slowly in her cheeks:–
“What am I thinking of?”
She turned as at a call and saw Chol Ho.

“Chol Ho! Chol Ho!...”
Her call was filled with fright and happiness
Mingled into a single note.

“What’s wrong?”
“This morning Yong Nam died.”
“Oh, what misfortune!”
Kkotpun’s tender heart
Was pierced by scalding sorrow.

An hour passed by, and then Chol Ho departed,
And with him went Kkotpun, who told the village
She was going to the city to sell blossom
From the azalea, blossom they had gathered
There together by the stream,
Leaving behind them not a single flower.

CHAPTER SIX

1

Oh mighty river Amnok,
Thousands of *ri* your waters shine
Along their journey to the sea.
But now the mist
Is shrouding them in darkness,
And shrouding too the lonely raft,
That drifts down slowly with the stream.
From out the little hut upon the raft
A plaintive song is heard upon the air:

“We play the pipe
And drift along.
Our native fields
Are long since gone.
Many *ri* before us lie
On the course that we must ply.
As we drift on to foreign parts
And leave at home our broken hearts....”

Why is this song so sad upon the air?
Such is the fate of all the people’s songs
When their ancestral land is wracked
In pain and torment.
How could their songs be otherwise,
When from the ancient pines

The Japanese have built their spacious halls
And there make merry, and drink wine,
And the poor houses of Korean peasants
Are falling into ruin and decay,
Their roofs and pillars rotting with the years?

2

When it grew dark and the cool breeze of evening
Fanned the Amnok river's gentle waves,
From high upon the rocky northern shore
A drawn-out whistle echoed through the air,
And straightaway was answered on the raft
By the gleam of a little signal lamp,
And the raft swayed and turned towards the
shore.

Two men step out on to the shore–
The raftsman and the partisan Chol Ho.
And they are joined by other warriors,
Swift and silent as they slip across the rocks.
Plain raft upon the Amnok waters,
You have now become a bridge
That leads into their homeland,
A floating bridge that now will lead
These warriors back to their own native home.
The bridge is set afloat,
And echoing gently through the darkness
There comes an old Korean song:
"Though far away from home
The waves may carry us–

Our ship will still return
To our own native shore....”

3

This, then, is their own Korean land,
Tormented ever by malicious foes,
Koreans can find no place here to live,
And no space even after they are dead.

I have a question for the partisans:
Was it so long ago you crossed the river
From this far Korean side
To stand like wandering beggars
On a foreign shore,
On land unworked and alien?

Who remembers how the wind sighed then
In echo of those travellers’ sighs?
Who remembers how the Amnok beat its waves
To foam against the rocky cliffs,
And the spray thrown up in the air
Was like the tears of those making the crossing?...

Oh, mighty river Amnok!
Raise high your waves today
And let them roar,
And let their echo thunder on
Across the breadth of our Korean land!

Today her sons are come to her again,

Come to her from the distant Changbai
mountains,
Lighting their route along the way
With the flames of their freedom-loving hearts.
Oh mighty river Amnok!
Raise high your stormy waves today
And let them roar
And let the echo thunder on
And tell our ancient homeland
That her sons are come once more
To light upon Korean land
The fire of struggle and of liberation.

4

A small town lies in a ravine.
Ten o'clock at night,
The citizens have all put out their lights
And fallen into sleep.
The doors are long since locked
In all the shops where people haggled as they
bought
And struggled to out-cheat each other.

Even the taverns are quiet now,
And the Japanese drunks
Have caterwauled their "Kusatsu yoitoko"
And gone home from their filthy Japanese
whores.
And on the outskirts,
In an old decrepit shack,

Where a poor boatman's wife
This morning lost her husband,
The lamentations are now over.
The widow sleeps,
Sunk in a weary slumber without dreams,
And at her side there sleep her sons,
With the emaciated faces of old men.

5

Ten o'clock at night,
The town is sleeping.
Only the street lamps splutter feebly,
Lighting the weary silence of the streets.
Behind his desk at the police-station,
The duty sergeant dozes quietly
Until he is awakened by the shouting
Of a woman, who shoves in through the door,
A drunken, ragged-looking tramp,
Who scarcely holds himself erect.

"What's wrong?" the policeman asks the woman.
"He won't give me the money for my wine!"
"Money for what?" the tramp asks, laughing.
"That's a good joke, by God. ..."

"What are you laughing at?"
Yells out the sergeant,
"How dare you laugh in front of me?
I'll teach you, you Korean dog,
To keep your laughter to yourself!"

He got up from his chair,
And clenched his fists,
And went towards the man.
But a swift blow to the temple
From the butt of a revolver
Felled him grunting to the floor.

The woman (who was Kkotpun)
Went to the telephone
And cut the wires.
Chol Ho–the political worker–
Threw the station doors wide open
And signalled with his lamp.

Immediately somewhere a shot rang out,
Then it was followed by a volley from all sides:
In the post-office, in the bank, in the town-hall
And in the office of the forestry.
Across the cloudy night-time sky
Machine-gun bullets traced a dotted line.

6

Enemies run bewildered to and fro,
And fall beneath the blazing fire.
The prison burns,
So does the Japanese town-hall,
The houses of the Japanese,
The houses of the traitors,
And as the flames grow higher,
They light up all the night-time town.

This is the first time in long years of slavery
That streets trampled into submission
Have echoed to this mighty voice,
This summons to resistance and to hope.
Along the streets roused from their slumber
Run men and women, children too,
Even an old man with no hat on
Runs together with them to the square,
Where crowds, illuminated by the fire,
Surge back and forth in noisy waves.

Suddenly all fell silent
As Kim Il Sung led his detachment
Out on to the square,
And raised aloft his naked sabre,
Fire gleaming in the polished steel.

“Koreans!
Take a close look at the flames
Unleashed against the Japanese!
Korea’s soul is still alive,
The heart of our immortal people
Is beating still today!
Let us all fan these flames
Until our enemy is reduced to ashes!”
Then we shall hear a great “Manse!”
That shakes the houses and the streets,
And a flame that reaches to the sky
Shall pierce the gloom above our ancient land.

7

Illuminated by the scarlet light,
And chanting revolutionary songs,
The partisans march out of town,
Leaving behind an atmosphere of hope.
Crowds of people see them on their way:
“Travel in safety, heroes of our land!”
“May happiness and victory be yours!”
And in the firelight’s ruddy glow
The tears upon their faces are like blood.

“May you be happy, friends who stay behind!”
“Fight for our people’s freedom!”
“We shall meet again, dear comrades
At the martial feast of liberation!”
And stepping forth into the night
The partisans move in full battle order,
Their steady marching footsteps leading on
To fields where other battles still await them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1

Across the gorges, woods and mountains
The partisans advance to Amnok river
To cross its waters on their journey back.
This journey leads them not to bitter exile,
But to a glorious struggle of retribution.
The river seems to share their joyful feelings
And on the surface of its deep-blue waters
Bright silver glimmers
Greet Korea's warrior sons.

The night comes and beneath its cover
The partisans bind rafts together.
The work is drawing to a close
When from the distant hilly slopes
There comes a sudden rumbling of artillery.

The waters of the Amnok seethe in fury
At the explosions of the flying shells.
The rattle of machine-gun fire
Is borne upon the wind from far away.
The Japanese are hastening their troops
To pin the partisans against the Amnok,
Encircle them and kill them to a man.

"Surrounded!"

The thought roused a sudden terror,
Into the river
Plunged one of the warriors,
Soon to be followed by another.

But instantly two shots rang out behind them
Commander Kim's voice called "Obey my
orders!"
And only the two traitors did not hear him–
Their bodies sank beneath the Amnok's waves
And were swept into darkness
By the rushing waters.

2

"Calm yourselves, friends!" came the command–
"Continue with your work!"
Kim Il Sung worked beside them
In the hail of bullets
While a small covering detachment
Climbed up on to the cliffs,
Commanded by Chol Ho.

Then finally the rafts are ready,
And the main body of the partisans
Sets out under the cover of the mist
Towards the other shore.
The Japanese guns roar and rumble,
Raining down a steely lava,
As though some great volcano belching fire
Had erupted and engulfed the stilly night.

Two partisans were last to leap on board
The very final raft to leave the shore:
Chol Ho and his companion Sok Jun.
Then came a sudden blast
And Chol Ho fell unconscious
And very nearly tumbled from the raft.

3

Behind them in the mist
The Japanese were shouting.
Chol Ho awoke and saw them there.
He summoned all his strength
Into his wounded arm,
Pulled a grenade out from his belt
And tossed it straight into the enemy throng.

The blast was followed by the groans of Japanese.
Chol Ho took out the last of his grenades.
But then another shell fell on the raft,
And smashed it into two,
And through the smoke and flame
Chol Ho saw Sok Jun fallen on his back
Across the barrel of his soldier’s rifle.

Chol Ho attempts to raise the stricken warrior,
But he is dead.
Another shell goes whining overhead...
Another blast...
The seething waters rise

And cover the two partisans forever.

4

The enemy lost heart and halted the bombar-
dment,
The rafts all landed on the distant shore,
And then a girl's voice called out in the darkness:
"Chol Ho! Sok Jun!"
The voice belonged to fair Kkotpun.
"Chol Ho! Sok Jun!"
Called out the voice of the commander,
The ringing voice of Kim Il Sung.
There was no answer.
Only the waves smashing against the rafts.
"Chol Ho! Sok Jun!"
Kkotpun called out despairing.
There was no answer to the maiden's call.
Only the Amnok's waves pounding against the
cliffs.

5

Upon the mountain slope, beside a cliff,
The partisans stand motionless in ranks.
And there among them stands their own
commander,
Together with Sun Son, Kkotpun and all the
rest.

But nowhere in the ranks is there a sign
Of either Chol Ho or Sok Jun.
The warriors gaze in wrath upon their homeland,
Enveloped in the inky black of night.

From the far shore they still can hear
The dull shots of pursuing rifles,
Fired in helpless fury.

“Comrades! My friends!” said Kim Il Sung,
“For months and years we fought the enemy
On land that was not ours.
But this night we have broken through the cordon
Of Japanese garrisons to victory on our native soil!
Comrades! The enemy is powerful,
And we had to return across the Amnok,
Losing two valiant friends along the way,
And we do not know where their bodies lie...”

6

“My friends and brothers!”
(The powerful voice resumed its steely ring.)
“Although the garrison we crushed last night
Was very small, the fire we lit there in that town
Will yet enflame the heart of our poor country,
And spark a blaze of struggle and resistance.
“Although attack was followed by withdrawal,
I have no doubt that we shall come again.
Long live Korea, Homeland, Mother!”

As he swore loyalty to his homeland,
Kim seized his bayonet
And raised the blade on high.
A forest of rifles sprouted up before him,
The partisans all shouted in one voice:
“Korea, we shall return!
As long as we shall live,
The enemy shall not break us!
For in our struggle we are not alone–
We have support from the land of the Soviets,
The hope of the oppressed,
The land that will rewrite the book of history.
The sword of retribution will destroy the samurai,
We shall sweep all the vermin from our country,
And our love of our Motherland
Will fan the flames of struggle for liberation!
Partisans! A volley!
For our victory in the bloody struggle!
Partisans! A volley!
To the memory of the heroes
Fallen in the sacred struggle!
Korea! For your happiness and freedom,
For democracy and happiness!”
The volley thundered out across the mountains
And on and on for three thousand *ri*.

EPILOGUE

Oh Paektu, sacred mountain,
The mountain crests are folded in your hands
Like the spokes of a fan.
Your grey mane floats on high above the clouds,
And for thousands of centuries you have seen
All that lies there below you.
Tell me, in that hour when the dawn arose
And clouds hung thickly in the sky
Above the bowl of the Lake of the Heavens,
Oh Paektu, sacred mountain,
Who did you greet that dawn?

Shaking his snow-white mane,
The ancient mountain Paektu answers thus:
"Harken to my words and I will speak.
The dawn arose upon our land
When the Tuman river was covered o'er with foam
From shells that fell into its waters,
And the partisans up on the mountain slopes
Send down a bail of fire upon the samurai.
The smoke of battle blew around me then
And I forgot my age and became young,
I met the Soviet warriors
Who crushed the marauders in the East and West.
I met the leader Kim Il Sung,
My own beloved son,

So long awaited by Korea's people,
Their long-awaited conscience, will and hope,
The glory of his ancient homeland.
I met my children Sun Son and Kkotpun,
And at my feet I saw how people wept
With tears of joy,
Pronouncing their new freedom,
And pronouncing my eternal life."
Then tell me, Oh great Paektu mountain,
What do you see now when the dawn arrives?

Shaking his snow-white mane,
The Mountain Lord makes answer thus:
"Today I see the free Korean people
Engaging in free labour,
The smoke of factory chimneys,
Fields belonging to the peasants,
Where abundant harvests ripen.
And finally, I see our Kim Il Sung,
The leader of the Democratic Front.
I see the friendly Soviet warriors.
"Today I gaze on Moran mountain
And seem to see there in their millions
The free citizens of my native land,
Unified by a single common dream–
The future of Democratic Korea.
"The view is different down at Mt. Samgak's feet–
Reaction rages, and the mindless face of terror
Is exposed in all its vileness.
But still the voice of the Democratic Front

Is ever stronger.
Ever brighter are the green leaves
Of the pine grove on the Southern mountain."

Thus speaks the great Mountain Lord Paektu,
But gazing on the south part of our country,
He shudders in a furious rage,
Seizing the wind from off his icy heights
To hurl it into the Lake of the Heavens,
Rousing waves that rise up to the sky
And fall upon the rocky cliffs
So that their thunder shakes the earth
Upon its axis,
And Paektu mountain, shaking his white mane,
Gazes northwards, on beyond the Urals,
Then turns his gaze beyond the mountains of
Kuenlun,
Up to the outcrops of the Himalayas,
Where China is constructing a new life.
In wrath he gazes out to the Pacific
To the land where Mount Fuji stands:
"Hear me and I shall speak.
Korea is being made anew here,
And alien forces cannot halt
The process of its building.
I proclaim–
A land of freedom,
A land of independence,
A land of people,
It will be strong as Paektu mountain,
And reach as high as Paektu mountain's peaks,
And shine bright as the great Lake of the Heavens!"